



**POLICY BRIEF**

## **The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States: What Next?**

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Along with the wider Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago participated in the formation of The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) from its inception in the Summit on Integration and Development (CALC) which was held in Bahia, Brazil in 2008. This process continued from the eventual consolidation of the CALC with the Rio Group to the first political proclamation of the CELAC at the Unity Summit held in Rivera Maya, Mexico, in February 2010. The subsequent operationalization of CELAC under agreed rules of procedure and engagement took place at the Inaugural Summit which was held in Caracas, Venezuela, on 3 December, 2011 followed by the first CELAC Summit in Santiago, Chile, on 28 January, 2013. In all instances CARICOM Heads of State and of Government Ministers and Senior Officials participated and made contributions to the final outcomes.

Given its configuration, CELAC brings together all of the constituencies of language and culture of Latin America and the Caribbean, a very diverse profile according to geographical size, natural resource endowment, economic performance, vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters and relatively mature systems of sub-regional integration.

The Community also took the bold step of excluding the United States of America and Canada to represent a virtual union of the South, and appears to some, to represent a rival force to the Organization of American States.

The Unity Summit in Mexico also succeeded in the merger of the Rio Group, which up to that point was the major institution for political consultation and coordination in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the new CALC, which has assumed the bold responsibility of creating a wider economic space across Latin America and the Caribbean. Up to the time of the Unity Summit five CARICOM members<sup>1</sup> had become full members of the Rio Group where previously one CARICOM member represented the Group as a whole.

The point is that while the CELAC is a fresh initiative with a very high ambition, in many respects it is not a very difficult project for the Caribbean to bring within focus and to manage, certainly not for CARICOM. CELAC it is not an alien concept for CARICOM.

In 1984, The Fifth Conference of CARICOM Heads of Government held in Nassau Bahamas spoke about closer economic and culture co-operation with the non-English-speaking Caribbean countries and to offering our neighbours Observer Status in certain Standing Committees of CARICOM; greater trade and economic co-operation within Latin America and exploring the possibility of negotiating a broadly-based preferential trade and economic co-operation agreement.<sup>2</sup>

The 1986 Georgetown Agreement of CARICOM Heads on the deepening and widening of CARICOM continued in similar vein and underscored the need to focus more sharply on specific markets in a phased approach towards the widening of trade and economic relations with the rest of the Caribbean and the mainland countries of Latin America as well as with non-traditional markets in the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> There was also the call for increased attention to be given to expanding trade with the French and Netherlands Antilles and to begin the process of deepening relations between CARICOM and the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Suriname.<sup>4</sup> The Conference of Heads also envisaged closer trade and economic cooperation with Brazil and the Andean Pact countries and the development of better transportation and marketing infrastructure between CARICOM and Latin America as a whole.

Subsequently, CARICOM initiated the call for the creation of the Association of Caribbean States in the light of the forward looking recommendations made in the West Indian Commission Report

*Time for Action.* CARICOM Heads met in a Special Conference held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in October, 1992 to discuss the Report of the West Indian Commission and the Communiqué heralded an agreement

to enter into consultation with other Caribbean States, Central American States and other Latin American countries of the Caribbean littoral, with the objective of establishing an Association of Caribbean States, as envisaged in the Report of the West Indian Commission.<sup>5</sup>

The Heads of Government were of the view that such an initiative would 'indicate the strong desire on the part of CARICOM States to enter into more meaningful relations with those countries'.<sup>6</sup>

The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) was formed in 1994 and the Inaugural Summit was held in 1995 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The Headquarters of the Association is located in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The Association of Caribbean States includes as founding members, Mexico, all the countries of Central America, Venezuela, Colombia and the Non English Speaking Caribbean, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The Dutch and French Speaking Territories are associate members. The strategic approach identified for achieving the merger of the so-called wider Caribbean was based on the achievement of synergy and harmonization to avoid costly duplication of effort among integration movements and organizations already existing in the Caribbean: CARICOM, SICA, ECLAC, SELA, etc., without replacing such movements and drawing upon the considerable expertise acquired over time. The methodology provides for concurrent deepening of the said integration efforts.

CELAC is based on a similar methodology. The Declaration of Cancún speaks about building a common space for the purpose of deepening the political, economic, social and cultural integration of the Region and to establish effective commitments for joint action to promote sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean in a framework of unity, democracy, full respect for human rights, solidarity, cooperation, complementarity and political co-ordination.<sup>7</sup>

The Declaration also envisaged, as a means of promoting cooperation between the regional and sub-regional integration mechanisms, intensifying

the dialogue, coordination, interaction, consensus, synergies and convergence of actions among the regional and sub-regional integration mechanisms of Latin America and the Caribbean in order to deepen integration and accelerate regional development through the formulation of common and complementary projects.<sup>8</sup>

There was also the call for regional and sub-regional organizations and mechanisms

to promote specific schemes that favour the exchange of experiences and the identification of areas of cooperation, as well as the appropriate synergies and convergence of actions among the different sub-regional integration processes, in order to take specific steps that enable us to advance more deeply into the various dimensions of integration.<sup>9</sup>

The issues on the evolving agenda for CELAC are also very familiar to CARICOM. The 2012 Caracas Plan of Action emerged directly out of a master plan established by CALC Ministers in Montego Bay, Jamaica in 2009 and its headings are: the International Financial Crisis and the New Financial Architecture; Complementarity and cooperation between Regional and Sub-regional Integration Mechanisms; Energy; Infrastructure for the Physical Integration of Transport, Telecommunications and Frontiers; Social Development and Eradication of Hunger and Poverty; the Environment; Humanitarian Assistance; Protection to the Migrant; Culture; Information and Communication Technologies.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, some of the points listed in the 2012 Plan are of direct interest to CARICOM. Under the heading *International Financial Crisis and the New Financial Architecture* there is the stated intention

to implement and strengthen internal and regional capacities to prevent systemic risk crisis within the region, as well as the impact of extra-regional imbalances and the alleviation of its adverse effects and the prevention of its spreading, through solid monetary and fiscal policies and to design and implement prevention, mitigation and control measures of the crises from the best use of the exchange of information and experiences in the region.<sup>11</sup>

The proposal was advanced at the Santiago Summit (January, 2013) and the 2013 CELAC Plan of Action envisages the convening of the Second Meeting of Ministers of Finance of CELAC

to define measures to prevent the effects of the international financial and economic crisis on the economies of the region and promote a regional architecture without exclusion, adapted to the peculiarities and needs of Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup>

The First Meeting of Ministers of Finance took place in Viña del Mar, Chile in December 2012 with minimal CARICOM participation.<sup>13</sup> The Ministers agreed to establish a Finance Working Group, *inter alia*, to develop a strategy for dealing with external economic shocks that could impact on Latin America and the Caribbean.

If it is agreed that the small island states of CARICOM are highly vulnerable to external economic shocks complicated by increasingly violent natural disasters, then this is an area where regional solutions to systemic issues, attainable within the geographically wide and culturally diverse region that is the CELAC, should be beneficial to the member states of CARICOM. CARICOM members should be at the forefront of such deliberations at the technical level, since agreements to be entered would have implications for their economic, social and political well-being.

My proposal is based on involvement with the technical discussions within CELAC since 2009 and I would recommend strongly to senior officials and policy makers that have responsibility for regional integration within CARICOM that the main issues concerning CARICOM's participation in the CELAC should reflect consideration of the following:

- The CELAC agenda is relevant to CARICOM. Most of the areas identified for strategic focus by CELAC are areas that have engaged the attention of CARICOM at one point or another. CELAC has the task of ensuring that the consensus positions that are taken in order to advance in any area are consonant with CARICOM interests. CARICOM has to be more proactive and attentive to its interests.
- CARICOM's participation in technical deliberations at meetings held after the CELAC Summits is relatively low. Attendance at meetings of National Coordinators, at Ministerial level and at the level of Heads of State and Government continues to be quite good but the specific contributions to the debates, especially at the Senior Officials' level, and in the sectorial meetings, expert meetings and working groups should be more vigorous in order to ensure that CARICOM's specific concerns influence the final outcomes of the deliberations. In addition, the CARICOM Secretariat, as the technical arm should be

present at Senior Officials meetings and at the scheduled meetings of the integration organizations within CELAC. In the latter case, two major meetings were held in 2011 and 2012 up to January 2013 and, in both cases, the CARICOM Secretariat was not represented.

- CARICOM Members themselves would have to carry out the task of discerning the real benefits, if any, to be derived from participating at the inter-governmental level in CELAC. The issue of Summit fatigue is a very real one for the Small Island States of CARICOM with resource constraints. Global agendas are crowded and the cost of participation, which cannot be assumed to be low, has to be justified on the basis of real benefits. CELAC does offer very good opportunities for new economic and social convergences with real benefits and these should be actively considered by CARICOM.
- CARICOM would be very justified to base the success of its involvement in CELAC also on the ability to meet the public expectations concerning yet another integration experience. CARICOM is still challenged by some public scepticism concerning its own regional integration (deepening) and wider Caribbean integration (widening).
- CELAC is also a political entity. The new organization carries forward the historical legacy of the Rio Group, which had a high propensity to issue statements and adopt positions on regional, hemispheric and global issues, at the United Nations and in other multilateral fora. The CELAC agenda also includes an active programme of outreach to major global players such as the BRICS, the ASEAN, the European Union, the African Union and other selected countries and groups of countries. CARICOM would need to take an interest in this process in order to take advantage of such strategic alliances wherever possible, or to ensure that our particular political interests are being served and not compromised in any way. Broadly speaking, the strategic alliances identified and pursued by CELAC, thus far, appear to be consonant with CARICOM own intentions to position itself within the global arena. Our interests could only be promoted and protected, as appropriate, through active analysis and participation.

For yet another time and continuing, *the ball is in our courts.*

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, Belize. Previously, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica represented CARICOM
- <sup>2</sup> CARICOM Secretariat, *Communiqué issued at the Conclusion of the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community*, Nassau Bahamas, July, 1984
- <sup>3</sup> CARICOM Secretariat, *Communiqué issued at the Conclusion of the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community*, Georgetown, Guyana, July 1986.
- <sup>4</sup> Suriname and Haiti have since become members of CARICOM and there are active discussions in 2013 concerning the Dominican Republic joining the integration movement
- <sup>5</sup> CARICOM Secretariat, *Communiqué issued at the Conclusion of the Special Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community*, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 28 – 31 October, 1992
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> CALC Pro Tempore Secretariat, *Communique issued by the Heads of State and Government of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean at the Unity Summit, [21<sup>st</sup> Summit of the Rio Group and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Integration and Development (CALC)]*, Mayan Riviera, Mexico, 23 February 2010
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, paragraph 6.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, paragraph 7.
- <sup>10</sup> 2012 Caracas Action Plan adopted by the Inaugural Summit CELAC Heads of State and of Government, Caracas, Venezuela, 2-3 December, 2011
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> The Santiago Summit had the Draft 2013 Plan of Action for consideration but due to severe time constraints, the Plan was not finalized. The Heads issued the appropriate mandate and the Plan was finalized and adopted by the Fifth Meeting of National Coordinators of CELAC, which took place in Havana Cuba from 9 – 10 May 2013
- <sup>13</sup> Chilean Pro Tempore Secretariat, *Declaration of Viña del Mar* arising from the First Meeting of Ministers of Finance of CEAC held in Viña del Mar, Chile on 14 December 2013. The Ministers, inter alia, highlighted the importance of developing tools for strengthening the regional and international financial architecture that would provide buffers for the most vulnerable economies, as well as to strengthen the necessary measures that would be adopted in times of crisis. The Ministers agreed to the formation of a Finance Working Group that would meet in June 2013 to develop strategies for dealing with these and other objectives.